



March 6, 2015

CT General Assembly, Appropriations Committee  
Legislative Office Building 2700  
Hartford, CT 06106

Connie Dills' Testimony Regarding HB6824, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue

**Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Appropriations Committee:**

My name is Connie Dills. I work as a registered respiratory therapist and dedicate much of my personal time to organizations working to help people breathe – such an essential action to life which many of us take for granted. There is little one can do to more negatively affect their health more than smoking. I see the negative health effects of smoking each and every day. That is why I strongly encourage the committee to commit to investing in tobacco cessation and prevention programming in the state of Connecticut for FY16, FY17 and beyond.

Even in 2015, far too many Connecticut residents remain addicted to tobacco—a deadly product that not only cuts lives short, but causes diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, the third leading cause of death in America. As someone who works directly with COPD patients, I can tell you that this is a disease that cruelly robs its victims of their quality of life by making it so difficult to breathe that performing even normal daily activities becomes a problem. At this time there is no cure for COPD; but that doesn't mean we don't have the power to prevent its onset. Between 80 and 90 percent of all COPD cases are caused by smoking.

Connecticut can and must do more to help smokers quit and to prevent a new generation from getting hooked on nicotine through cigarettes and other emerging unregulated tobacco products. Imagine what the future would be like with significantly fewer people suffering and dying from lung diseases and other tobacco-caused diseases? How many more mothers and fathers will be there to see their children grow up, graduate from college, get married, start families of their own and be a part of their grandchildren's lives. I know you have many difficult budgetary considerations to make, but I ask you to consider funding tobacco prevention and cessation programs despite Governor Malloy's proposed budget. These programs can have a tremendous impact that, to most all of us, is simply priceless.

We need Connecticut to make a long term commitment and investment to reduce health care costs and to save lives by funding tobacco control programs. Florida has made great strides in the fight against tobacco on behalf of the youth of their state; their current youth smoking rate is 7.5%. Connecticut's youth cigarette smoking rate is 13.5%. The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids calculated what a 7.5% youth smoking rate would mean for each state. If CT saw a reduction in youth smoking to 7.5% we could expect 48,000 fewer adult smokers, 16,880 kids' lives saved and \$840M in future health care savings.<sup>1</sup>

Too many people think this battle against tobacco is a thing of the past, but I see evidence to the contrary every day. If the Governor's proposed budget were to go into effect, Connecticut would be fighting the estimated \$78 million that the tobacco industry spends in the state each year with nothing. In that fight, everyone loses.

I thank you for your time and consideration of my request. Thank you for your work on behalf of Connecticut residents.

Connie C. Dills, MBA, RRT, RPFT  
Chair of the American Lung Association in CT's Public Policy Committee

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<sup>i</sup> Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, Broken Promises to Our Children: A State-by-State Look at the 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 16 Years Later Report. National and State-Specific Impacts of Reducing Youth Smoking to 7.5%.

[http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/content/what\\_we\\_do/state\\_local\\_issues/settlement/FY2015/2014\\_12\\_11\\_brokenpromises\\_table\\_impacts.pdf](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/content/what_we_do/state_local_issues/settlement/FY2015/2014_12_11_brokenpromises_table_impacts.pdf)